

AIRLINE CHECKED BAGGAGE DAMAGE – HARD-SHELL SUITCASE REFUND/REIMBURSEMENT POLICY

Version: 1.0

Effective Date: 2026-01-30

Owner: Customer Care / Baggage Services

Applies To: Checked baggage (hard-shell suitcases) handled by the airline on eligible flights

1. PURPOSE

This policy defines when a passenger is eligible for repair, replacement, or reimbursement when a checked hard-shell suitcase is returned damaged.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- Hard-shell suitcases checked at the airline's check-in/bag drop and handled by the airline.
- Damage discovered at baggage claim or shortly after delivery (for delivered baggage).

This policy does not apply to:

- Carry-on baggage, gate-checked items handled as "limited release," or items packed inside the suitcase.
- Loss or delay claims (covered by separate policies).

3. DEFINITIONS

- "Hard-shell suitcase": A suitcase with a rigid exterior shell (polycarbonate/ABS/aluminum or similar).
- "Structural damage": Damage that compromises the suitcase's ability to protect contents or be used for travel.
- "Cosmetic damage": Surface-level marks that do not affect function.
- "Pre-existing damage": Damage present before airline acceptance.
- "Reported on time": A claim created within the reporting windows in Section 6.

4. ELIGIBILITY (HIGH-LEVEL)

A claim is eligible when ALL of the following are true:

- The item was checked and handled by the airline (baggage tag or tracking evidence).
- The damage is consistent with airline handling and was not pre-existing.
- The damage meets the "Eligible Damage" criteria (Section 5).
- The passenger reports the damage within the required timeframe (Section 6).
- Required documentation is provided (Section 7).

5. DAMAGE CATEGORIES

5.1 ELIGIBLE DAMAGE (REFUND/REIMBURSEMENT CONSIDERED)

The following damage to a hard-shell suitcase is generally eligible because it affects usability or structural integrity:

- Cracks or fractures through the shell (visible split lines that open under pressure).
- Holes or punctures through the shell.
- Shell separation (shell halves separating; seam separation; exposed interior).

- Frame deformation that prevents proper closure/locking.
- Broken, detached, or non-functional wheels (one or more) that prevents normal rolling.
- Broken, detached, or non-functional telescoping handle or carry handle.
- Broken hinge(s) preventing closure.
- Broken integrated lock or latch preventing secure closure.

5.2 CONDITIONALLY ELIGIBLE DAMAGE (REVIEW REQUIRED)

The following may be eligible depending on severity and impact on function:

- Deep dents in metal shells that prevent closing or compromise structure.
- Severe corner impact/crumpling that causes gaps or instability.
- Multiple large gouges that thin the shell material.
- Zipper-track damage (if applicable) that prevents closure.

5.3 NOT ELIGIBLE DAMAGE (NO REFUND/REIMBURSEMENT)

The following is generally not eligible because it is considered normal wear or minor cosmetic damage:

- Scuffs, scratches, small abrasions, paint transfer.
- Minor dents that do not affect closure or function.
- Small chips, nicks, or superficial cracks that do not penetrate the shell and do not expand under pressure.
- Dirty marks or stains.

5.4 EXCLUSIONS (ALWAYS NOT ELIGIBLE)

Claims are not eligible when any of the following applies:

- Pre-existing damage (including prior cracks, broken wheels/handles noted at check-in).
- Manufacturer defects, aging materials, or normal wear-and-tear.
- Overpacking/overstuffing or contents that caused the suitcase to fail.
- Improper packing, including unsecured heavy items inside that caused internal pressure damage.
- Fragile/unsuitable items checked against airline guidance.
- Damage to contents inside the suitcase (handled under contents policy; may have different limits).
- Damage caused after delivery/receipt by the passenger or third parties.

6. REPORTING DEADLINES

To be considered, passengers must report damage:

- At the airport: before leaving the baggage claim area whenever possible.
- After leaving the airport: within 24 hours of baggage pickup for damage discovered later.
- For delivered baggage (hotel/home delivery): within 24 hours of delivery.

If local law or an applicable international convention provides a longer window, the longer window may apply.

7. REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

The passenger must provide:

- Passenger name and contact details.
- Flight number(s), date(s), and itinerary.
- Bag tag number(s) or proof of check-in.
- Photos of the suitcase (see Section 8).
- Description of damage and when/where it was discovered.

For reimbursement (cash/credit) beyond repair:

- Proof of purchase or approximate age and comparable market value.
- Repair estimate (if requested) or receipt if passenger already paid for emergency repair (pre-approval may be required).

8. PHOTO REQUIREMENTS (FOR IMAGE-BASED ELIGIBILITY)

To support automated and manual review, photos should include:

- Full suitcase front and back (entire bag visible).
- Close-up of damaged area with good lighting.
- Angle shot showing depth/extent (e.g., crack opening, wheel detachment).
- Photo of bag tag attached to the bag (or tag receipt).
- Optional: photo of suitcase closed to show misalignment or inability to latch.

Photos must be clear, in focus, and show the damage without obstruction.

9. ASSESSMENT & DECISION RULES (COMPLIANCE LOGIC)

This section is designed for consistent eligibility decisions.

9.1 CLASSIFY DAMAGE SEVERITY

- Severity 0 (Cosmetic): surface marks only; no missing parts; bag closes/rolls normally.
- Severity 1 (Minor Functional Risk): small chip or shallow crack that does not penetrate; bag still closes/rolls.
- Severity 2 (Functional Impairment): wheel/handle/hinge/latch failure OR shell damage that affects closure.
- Severity 3 (Structural Failure): hole/puncture, major crack through shell, shell separation, frame deformation.

9.2 ELIGIBILITY DECISION

- Eligible: Severity 2 or 3 AND exclusions do not apply AND reported on time.
- Not eligible: Severity 0 AND no other functional damage.
- Review required: Severity 1 or unclear photos OR conflicting evidence.

9.3 IMAGE-BASED INDICATORS (WHAT TO LOOK FOR)

For a hard-shell suitcase, the following visual indicators strongly suggest eligibility:

- Through-crack: crack line with visible gap, or crack that opens when bag is slightly flexed.
- Puncture/hole: visible opening through outer shell material.
- Broken wheel: wheel missing, hanging, or axle detached; bag cannot stand level.
- Handle failure: telescoping handle stuck, missing, bent, or cannot extend/retract.
- Closure failure: misaligned shell halves, broken latch/lock, lid cannot stay closed.

Indicators that suggest "not eligible" (cosmetic only):

- Light scuffs, scratches, paint transfer without deformation.
- Small shallow dents with intact closure and wheels.

10. REMEDIES

If eligible, the airline may provide one of the following remedies:

- Repair: approved repair at airline-authorized repair center.
- Replacement: replacement with a comparable suitcase if repair is not feasible or cost-effective.
- Reimbursement: monetary reimbursement for repair or depreciated value replacement when appropriate.

The airline may choose the remedy based on feasibility, local availability, and cost.

11. COMPENSATION LIMITS

Reimbursement is subject to applicable legal limits and conditions. Limits may vary by itinerary and governing rules (e.g., domestic regulations or international conventions such as Montreal Convention).

12. CLAIM PROCESS

- A) Create a damage report (Property Irregularity Report / online claim).
- B) Upload required documentation and photos.
- C) Airline reviews and may request additional evidence.
- D) Decision issued (approve / deny / request more info).
- E) Remedy delivered (repair authorization, replacement pickup/shipment, or reimbursement payout).

Target timelines (non-binding):

- Initial acknowledgment: within 24 hours
- Decision: within 7–14 business days after receiving complete documentation

13. CUSTOMER COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

When denying claims:

- State the reason clearly (e.g., cosmetic-only; pre-existing; late reporting; excluded cause).
- Provide guidance on next steps (appeal process, additional evidence options).

14. APPEALS

Passengers may request a review if they provide new evidence (clearer photos, receipts, additional context). Appeals should be submitted within 14 days of denial, unless local law provides otherwise.

15. EXAMPLES (FOR TRAINING / QA)

Example A (Eligible): “A crack runs across the front panel; bag does not close properly; photo shows crack opening and misalignment.”

Example B (Eligible): “Rear wheel snapped off; wheel assembly missing; bag cannot roll.”

Example C (Not eligible): “Multiple scratches and scuffing on shell; wheels/handles intact; bag closes normally.”

Example D (Review): “Small chip near corner; unclear if crack penetrates; request close-ups and photo of bag closed.”

END OF POLICY